Of Celestial Bodies and Professional Life: “Connecting the Dots”

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When you look at the night sky’s stars, what do you see? A random collection of luminous plasma spheroids? Or do your thoughts organize the stars into definable patterns (constellations) described by those who long preceded us? Some may view these as cultural guideposts, even infusing meaning to our existence in this universe.

Those who see constellations with their iconic names—Orion, Ursa Major, Ursa Minor, Leo, Crux, Taurus, etc—connect those luminous dots, all at unfathomable distances, into rational arrangements from a two-dimensional perspective. We do this despite their absence of any type of real relationship from a three-dimensional perspective.

AANA Journal is your profession’s scholarly dissemination source. We go about our lives, we see the Journal, most of us read it, but what may go unnoticed are the downstream effects of the Journal. Academic journalism was born some 350 years ago in the form of Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society, the product of Henry Oldenburg and Robert Hooke.¹ You could say our Journal emerged from that primordial soup.

Why do authors want to publish in the Journal? Early in one’s career, before crossing the Rubicon of its trajectory, some wish to add a line to their CV and advance (or enhance) their career in a way that defies succinct articulation. The drive may come from a place that although different than, is also somewhat similar to community volunteering, aiding a friend, or even donating to a charity. It’s a sometimes nebulous thing—a “need to do something” or “to make a difference.” Perhaps what motivates us in this impulse is the sense that one has something helpful to say or do, maybe even to inspire others.

Then there are those who genuinely wish to change the way we think about things, to debate, to stir others into a new pattern of thought, to make a genuine and novel contribution to the profession. Formally sharing information or experiences, then seeing others adopt them, can be incredibly satisfying on a deeply personal level.

There are also those whose impetus to publish emerges not fully from within, but from external motivators. Think of the academic who works in an environment where success is measured by the number and quality of their publications, urged to publish by an institution’s promotion and tenure process. The AANA Journal showcases the work of CRNAs to the world when those publishing opportunities for CRNAs are few and gaining entrance to top-tier medical journals is, at best, extremely difficult.

Researchers wanting to start a study (or nurture an ongoing one) need a publication record demonstrating to a funding source, success in their discipline. A sort of chicken or the egg (which came first?) problem because money is needed to do research, yet funding agencies want to see evidence of success, usually a formal track record of reputable publication. A classic example of a “catch-22.” Also, of course, Journal content educates CRNAs, which prioritizes patient safety, thus advancing the safe, evidence-based practice of nurse anesthesia.

All of this is not meant to imply that each motivation works in isolation. Considerable overlap and interweaving occurs. With more than 28,000 peer reviewed journals printed and close to 2 million articles published in them each year, this manner of dissemination is alive and well.

For whatever reason or set of reasons, formally publishing in a peer-reviewed source, like the Journal, is very much like connecting those dots where one’s...
professional life, and personal interests and pursuits, finally accreting into a three-dimensional matrix. Scholarship, and its dissemination, provides additional meaning, even prosperity to one’s career. Meaning in the form of career advancement, opportunities to mentor others, stimulating thought, and advancing our profession at large.

It may be difficult for some to connect the dots, looking at the role of scholarly activity in two-dimensions, as one might a constellation. Rather, on closer examination, dots can be “connected” by engaging in scholarly activity, as a writer, reviewer, mentor, and/or reader of the Journal.

There are existential threats to biomedical publications due to both economic issues and the digitalization of some scholarly activities, the latter gaining significant traction at the turn of the 21st century. Open access journals—those that do not charge by subscriber, instead requiring authors to pay processing fees—present a threat to existing subscriber-based journals. Online publications do not carry the prestige of printed publications when tenure or career advancement is being considered. Again, AANA Journal is there for CRNAs, illuminating CRNA practice for the world.

AANA Journal, much like other biomedical publications, serves multiple functions—it curates, catalyzes, and clarifies a constellation of crucial information to our readers. It brands us as to who and what we are, and it very much “connects the dots” of our contributors’ and readers’ professional, and dare I say, personal lives.

REFERENCES